

February 1, 1968

Mr. James E. Webb
Administrator
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Washington, D. C. 20546

Dear Mr. Webb:

During the time since my very stimulating and thought-provoking visit with you on Saturday, January 13, I have been thinking very seriously about making a commitment towards a feasibility study along the lines of our discussion. I have also been talking with a number of my colleagues here, and believe there would be a group of us who would pursue certain studies along these lines with great enthusiasm and interest.

I would then be interested in formulating a proposal for a feasibility study of a mechanism by which the faculty of a privately endowed university could best contribute its intellectual resources to public problems, while still performing its primary role within the institution. In order to formulate such a mechanism for our own participation we would want to make a detailed critique of a variety of proposals, embodied in different ways of organizing ourselves for such tasks. This critique would then be the tangible report coming out of our study and, in the most favorable circumstances, might suggest the best pattern of organization from which to proceed with more comprehensive proposals.

I would suggest that we have a prototype problem in mind, namely recommendations on how to think about allocating resources for competing scientific and technological programs. However, the main purpose of our preliminary study will not be to answer this question, but rather to inquire about the most effective ways in which a university faculty can organize itself to deal with this and similar kinds of problems.

If this matter is still of interest to you I would be grateful for suggestions from you or your staff on making the next steps. I would have in mind a two year contract, allowing up to \$30,000 in direct costs, perhaps subject to informal renegotiation after the first year, by when we should at least have a much clearer picture of our goals and opportunities.

I am also enclosing some notes that I wrote down during my trip home from Washington. These are not part of any formal proposal, but may give some idea of the concerns that I have about some of the more obvious or already prevalent patterns of advice.

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At the moment I must confess that I see grave difficulties in attempts to institutionalize the social-critical role of university professors, but I of course have not make the kind of study contemplated for the contract, and much of our effort would indeed be devoted to assessing the gravity and finding ways around such difficulties. The value that has to be preserved is the intellectual independence of the individual professor. I am hopeful that we can find some framework which does conserve this, but still provides a more effective channel for group deliberation and advice.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics